



† *Designated as an Exemplary Final Project for 2014-15*

## **Girl Meets Wolf: Little Red Riding Hood, Adaptation, and the Art of Storytelling**

**Dierdre Reynolds Shipman**

**Faculty Advisor: Ann Marie Rasmussen, Ph.D.  
Duke University Department of German**

**Submitted: November 24, 2014**

This project was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Graduate Liberal Studies Program in the Graduate School of Duke University.

Copyright by  
Dierdre Reynolds Shipman  
2014

## **Abstract**

In order to prepare my own adaptation of the fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood, I investigate not only what it is that fairy tales do, but also how they do it: the techniques used by the stories we think of as the original tales. In addition, I explore the technical aspects of adaptations of the story by some master storytellers of page, stage and screen, comparing ways they have layered and expanded meaning of the simple story by use of visual imagery across a variety of media. I consider why people adapt rather than create their own raw material. Why isn't once enough?

## **Acknowledgements**

I had many magical helpers on this journey and I would like to especially thank Ann Marie Rasmussen for her optimism, Donna Zapf for her vision, Marilyn Shipman for support both practical and emotional, Cyndi Bunn for her patience and enthusiasm, and Adrienne Brandon for inspiration and mental health breaks.

In addition, I want to recognize the fairy tale blogs that consistently aid navigation in these woods:

[fairytalenewsblog.blogspot.com](http://fairytalenewsblog.blogspot.com)

[surlalunefairytales.blogspot.com](http://surlalunefairytales.blogspot.com)

[talesoffaerie.blogspot.com](http://talesoffaerie.blogspot.com)

[terriwindling.com/blog](http://terriwindling.com/blog)

And finally, I must thank the stars for Edward Shipman, a true partner, without whose love and assistance I would be lost indeed.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Abstract.....   | iii |
| Acknowledgements.....                                   | iv  |
| Introduction.....                                       | 1   |
| Chapter One: Literary Origins & Historical Context..... | 7   |
| Chapter Two: Looking at Little Red Riding Hood .....    | 24  |
| Chapter Three: The Wolf's Companion.....                | 42  |
| Conclusion.....   | 64  |
| Appendix: Visual Evidence.....                          | 66  |
| Bibliography.....                                       | 71  |

## **Introduction**

Once upon a time, I was a little girl being raised in the woods by humanists and nurtured on a steady diet of fairy tales and Greek mythology. Those stories have stayed with me as their messages inform my approach to life and their illustrations influence my work as an artist and costume designer. I still believe that magic happens, that courage and kindness are essential, that help arrives in unexpected ways, and that telling stories builds connection. As I have wandered down my own interdisciplinary path through graduate liberal studies, I find that the unifying theme connecting my choice of classes is storytelling in a variety of media: theater arts, film, visual art, memoir and historical records. This has inspired me to consider doing some of my own storytelling in a multimedia format, and my vehicle of choice is the fairy tale known as Little Red Riding Hood.

In order to prepare my own interpretation, it felt important to understand not only what it is that fairy tales do, but also how they do it: the techniques used by the stories we think of as the original tales. In addition, I wanted to explore the technical aspects of adaptations of the story by some master storytellers and investigate the ways they have layered and expanded the meaning of the simple story by use of visual imagery. This opened the door to thinking about adaptation as a general concept and considering why people adapt rather than create their own raw material. Why isn't once enough? The more I look at interpretations of

Little Red Riding Hood in illustration, literature, film, photography, theater, poetry, sculpture, television and even jewelry, the more overwhelmed I am with the wealth of responses and the more I am convinced that there are deep, important themes contained within the tale. How is it possible for one small story to inspire such a multiplicity of interpretations and remain the same story? And how in the world could I possibly bring anything new to the table?

The question of where to begin is perhaps the most difficult of all. I will start with a simple question that quickly becomes complicated. What do we mean by “fairy tale”? The term is generally understood to refer to a certain type of story that includes elements of fantasy such as magic and talking animals, typically centers on a young hero/ine engaged with a quest or a series of trials, and often concludes with a happy ending; it does not necessarily contain any fairies. The English term is a direct translation of “conte de fée” taken from its first use in Marie Catherine D’Aulnoy’s title for her collection of stories *Les Contes des Fées*, published in 1697. In his essay “On Fairy-Stories,” J.R.R. Tolkien suggests that fairy tales are less about fairies than about the adventures of humans in the land of Faërie, or as he also names it, the Perilous Realm, which is by nature indescribable (Tolkien 16). For Tolkien’s purposes, the presence of magic is a sign of the fairy tale, and it can be used in a variety of genres including satire, adventure or fantasy as long as the magic itself is taken seriously.

Because fairy tales are rich in apparent symbolism and because variations of the same tale are often found in diverse and seemingly unconnected geographic locations, scholars for the past two hundred years have speculated endlessly regarding the origin and the “true” meaning of the stories. There has been vigorous debate over whether fairy tales with similar themes evolve independently in different countries thereby indicating a pipeline into the collective unconscious, or whether they can all be traced back to a common ancestor. Likewise, there is rarely agreement as to what a particular story means. Little Red Riding Hood, for instance, has variously been seen as a surviving fragment of an ancient solar myth, as a cautionary tale, as an initiation story for girls approaching adulthood, as an allegory representing the pure German versus the evil foreigner, as a model of how young girls work through their oedipal anxieties, and as an example of how patriarchal oppression uses rape to keep transgressive females on the straight and narrow (Teverson 6). Entire books have been devoted to this one anomalous fairy tale that features no princess, no marriage, and no magic spell.

I am very interested in what all the opinions are, and what archetypes or historical facts may or may not show up in the story, but as a maker of art, I will follow Tolkien’s lead. In his essay, Tolkien does consider the debate of independent evolution versus inheritance from a common ancestor, but simply is not invested in determining one answer. “It is plain enough that fairy-stories...are very ancient indeed. Related things appear in very early records; and they are

found universally, wherever there is language” (Tolkien 24). Tolkien stresses the importance of looking at what it is that fairy tales DO. He is not interested in focusing on origins, stating that it is “more interesting and also in its own way, more difficult, to consider what they are, what they have become for us, and what values the long, alchemic processes of time have produced in them” (Tolkien 22).

So what is it that fairy tales do and how do they do it? Tolkien sees one of the primary values of fairy tales as their ability to help us see things clearly, with a fresh perspective, and he thinks the better stories deal primarily with simple things, illuminating “the potency of the words, and the wonder of the things, such as stone and wood and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine” (Tolkien 53). The more well-known French and German fairy tales are extremely economical, stripped down to the bare essentials of character and plot. The near complete absence of extraneous description, motivation or introspection makes every word count and imbues each object with meaning. Fairy-tale scholar Max Lüthi finds the style and content of these stories intrinsically reassuring on a deep level: because the fairy tale assimilates the world’s elements and arranges them “in beautiful order through the context of the tale,” the reader is included in that perfect order, a part of everything (Lüthi 94). In his seminal work *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*, Lüthi uses the term “depthlessness” (*Flächenhaftigkeit*) to describe the absence of inner life or context in fairy tale characters. Red Riding Hood’s simple story tackles some big life and death issues, but it is the lack of detailed information combined with the tale’s striking

imagery which gives it the ability to resonate with so many, inspiring multiple interpretations, both scholarly and artistic, and the elasticity of the genre continues to absorb them all.

While part of a fairy tale's charm and intrigue is its multiplicity of versions with no single author, for the purposes of this investigation I'll be looking at Western European origins and following the evolutionary line from the texts of Charles Perrault and the brothers Grimm. Linda Hutcheon's *Theory of Adaptation* has provided important vocabulary and signposts for my thinking about adaptation as evolution and how the various media use different modes of engagement with the audience. By using the tool of close analysis on a single, essential moment of the story – girl meets wolf (the Encounter) – I endeavor to thoroughly examine the components of storytelling technique both written and visual as seen in: 1) the European origins of the story in literary form, 2) one key illustration by Gustave Doré, 3) the collaborative theater arts involved in a live performance by Fiasco Theater Company of the Sondheim musical *Into The Woods*, and 4) Angela Carter's short story *The Company of Wolves* through its evolution into a radio play and then into the feature-length film directed by Neil Jordan.

Had I but world enough and time, this paper would include analysis of many other artists' works. Anne Sexton's poem "Red Riding Hood" from her fairytale-inspired collection *Transformations* was one of my first clues that something serious was going on in this story. I would love to spend more time

with American artist Kiki Smith's sculpture and prints addressing the intersection of woman and wolf. Photographer Sarah Moon has interpreted Perrault's text in stunning black and white imagery that completely changes the time and setting of the story, and Nalo Hopkinson's short story "Riding the Red" in *Skinfolk* gives the tale from Granny's perspective in a very intriguing way. I'd even like to take a second look at cartoon animator Tex Avery's hilarious/appalling rendition of "Red Hot Riding Hood." I think perhaps it is for the best that outside constraints have been imposed on this particular project!

Since Perrault fixed the story in written form in 1697, putting his own slant on this so-called tale from "Mother Goose," each adaptation of the girl's story has revealed something about cultural obsessions with sex, death and the act of eating, as well as how we humans have responded over time to wolves and the color red. The story's imagery raises many questions that visual and performance artists must answer concretely: Is this an actual talking wolf, a werewolf, or a metaphorical wolf? How old is this girl? How big is the wolf? What sorts of trees are in this forest? What is she wearing on her head, exactly? There are existential questions with which the artist must engage in order to make design choices: What is the nature of the relationship between human and animal? What do the woods represent? What is the significance of the color red? So that I can begin to answer these questions for myself, I invite you to follow me through these woods and see how some masters of their respective fields have interacted with the girl and the wolf.

## **Chapter One: Literary Origins and Historical Context of Little Red Riding Hood**

Little Red Riding Hood is a fairy tale superstar. Her iconic cape in conjunction with a wolf or the woods is instantly recognizable on an international scale. She is known as Röttkappchen, Le Petit Chaperon Rouge, Roodkapje, Caperucita Roja, Czerwony Kapturek, Cappuccetto Rosso. Here in the U.S., she has featured lately in three popular TV shows and one full-length Hollywood movie, and she is about to reappear both on film and on Broadway in a musical. In the world of Western European fairy tales, her story is one of the big seven that include Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel, and Beauty & The Beast. But what exactly is her story? (Hint: this is a trick question.) Often people find that they remember it different ways, or they're not quite sure about the ending. There is no Disney version to refer to, which is perplexing. In spite of that, or one might argue, perhaps partially because of that, there are a variety of Little Red Riding Hood (LRRH) stories flourishing around the world with very different endings.

In Western culture, most LRRH stories contain the following plot elements: A girl is told by her mother to walk through the woods and take a basket of food to her grandmother. On the way, she meets a wolf and they have a conversation during which she tells the wolf where her granny lives. They take different paths from there, and the wolf reaches granny's cottage first. By



pretending to be the girl, he tricks the old woman into letting him in and promptly eats her up. The wolf disguises himself as Granny, gets in her bed and waits for the girl to arrive. When she does, she quizzes the appearance of the wolf with a series of observations that end with “Granny, what big teeth you have!” The wolf replies “The better to eat you with!” and gobbles down the little girl.

In the first literary version of the story by Charles Perrault, *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, this is where the story ends. His 1697 version in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* was disseminated widely and concluded with a moral in verse making it clear that young girls should not listen to strangers and if they do, can expect to be eaten by a wolf. In case the reader had somehow missed the point, Perrault lays out the message with a caution against the wolves who are:

...tame, pleasant and gentle,  
Following young ladies  
Right into their homes, into their chambers,  
But watch out if you haven't learned that tame wolves  
Are the most dangerous of all. (Classic 13)

Perrault was a highly educated intellectual and administrator in the court of Louis XIV. He framed the presentation of his stories as frivolous “Tales of Mother Goose” that purported to be tales told to him by an old wife. But it was not children that he sought to entertain; his audience was the court. He made this story an ultimate cautionary tale, and perhaps meant exactly what he said. Folklore scholars strongly suspect that Perrault took an older version of this story and changed the ending for his own purposes, because it is so rare for a fairy tale to end in tragedy. But I wonder if there were not courtiers of the Sun King

who did take one interpretation of Perrault's message to heart: if you listen to the wrong person, or confide in the wrong person, you could die.

The story's moral reflects a different matter of life or death at court. Standard behavior of the sophisticated married ladies of the court at that time included hosting salons in their homes. Some of these ladies even received guests of both sexes in their private chambers, in a very public way, and extramarital affairs were par for the course in Versailles. But at the same time, a girl's reputation was a fragile thing and any misbehavior that publicly compromised her reputation might very well lower her value on the aristocratic marriage market, a fate far worse than death. The French have a saying that was current in Perrault's time, "elle a vu le loup" (Orenstein 26). It is much quoted by scholars looking at Red Riding Hood. It translates to "she has seen the wolf," but the meaning is "she has lost her virginity." Perrault is obviously playing not only with this concept of man as wolf, but also with the sexual connotations of hunger and eating. Somehow the wolf is already something of a sexy beast at this point, but more on that later.

Although Perrault has the distinction of popularizing the first written version of the story, most people are more familiar with the adaptation created by the Grimms. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm presented their stories as folk tales of the German people collected in field research and they published the first edition of their legendary *Kinder- und Hausmarchen* in 1812. It has come to light that their sources were not exactly peasants in the field. Several of the stories,

including the one they called *Rötkappchen*, had a middle class woman of French Huguenot descent as the source. And it turns out that the brothers did just as much revising and editorializing as Perrault did. They were creating their own literary adaptations of folk tales, not transcribing verbatim the words of illiterate folk. Because of the timing, it is quite possible that their source gave them a version of Perrault's story, but there is evidence that other oral versions of the tale existed at the time. If all they got was Perrault's version, their revisions were quite extensive.

To begin with, the Grimm version is a full page longer than Perrault's two pages. But more than just dialogue and description were added. The famous prohibition about not straying from the path is first seen in Grimm, and most importantly, the Grimms added the rescue of both grandmother and girl from the belly of the wolf by a passing huntsman. They seem to have lifted the ending of another French story, *The Wolf and the Kids* (aka *The Seven Little Goats*), wherein the consumed kids are resurrected and the same fatal punishment occurs for the devious predator: having his belly filled with stones and sewn back up. Allowing the resurrection of the heroine and her grandmother puts this story back into the "happily ever after" category, and certainly makes it more kid-friendly. (\*rimshot\*) The Grimms were writing for children as an audience and saw the passing of German folktales to the young as an important part of creating national identity. This attitude was unfortunately linked later to the Nazi agenda. There was an extremely bizarre Nazi analysis of *Rötkappchen* stating

conclusively that the Wolf represented the Jews and the little girl stood for all true Germans (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 39). Nonetheless, neither the authors' intent nor past associations have prevented translations of the stories from becoming bestsellers around the world. For over two centuries, the name of Grimm has been inextricably linked with fairy tales.

It would be helpful to examine the distinguishing features of the fairy tale form before looking at a more in-depth comparison of a particular scene. Max Lüthi, in his definitive study *Once Upon A Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales*, considers the fairy tale as "...an archetypal form of literature which helps lay the groundwork for all literature, for all art" (Lüthi 146). He looks at characteristics of the form such as the casual acceptance of magic, a tendency to extreme contrasts, and the absence of descriptive detail and suggests that the lack of description regarding appearances, feelings, and motivations creates a "...tendency to make feelings and relationships congeal into objects, so to speak, and thus become outwardly visible" (Lüthi 51). Instead of narrative explanation of character, "characteristics are expressed in actions, relationships in gifts" (Lüthi 56).

Scholar, editor & writer Kate Bernheimer, in her penetrating essay "Fairy Tale Is Form, Form Is Fairy Tale" (in *The Writer's Notebook*, 2009), helpfully condenses Lüthi's analysis into four distinct elements of the form: Flatness, Abstraction, Intuitive Logic and Normalized Magic. The term flatness refers to the presentation of characters without proper names, without emotions or

psychological depth, something like a blank screen on which we may project our own emotions and associations. Abstraction conveys the lack of detailed description in fairy tales; we do not know what the forest looks like or what color the wolf is, for instance. According to Bernheimer, “Fairy tales tell; they do not often show” (Writer’s 67). She notes the limited use of color in general, and points out that the rare nature of imagery in fairy tales makes it all the more noticeable when it occurs. It is important to look at the objects that are presented in fairy tales, because, as Lüthi puts it, “...the fairy tale clings to what is visible” (Lüthi 25).

The third element of intuitive logic centers on the absence of explanation regarding why things happen in a fairy tale, and the fact that neither the characters nor the reader questions what happens. This relates to Lüthi’s observation that the absence of descriptive details gives European fairy tale clarity and precision; the hero simply acts. The tendency to extreme contrasts means that issues are very clearly framed. The style dictates that “there is no ‘if’ and no ‘perhaps’” (Lüthi 57). Why does a little girl walk into the woods by herself? Because her mother told her to! How could a child mistake a wolf for a grandmother? Because it makes a better story! Each action seems inevitable, as if this is how things must happen. Bernheimer points out that this pattern is contrary to fairy tales’ reputation as being “plot-driven narratives” (Writer’s 68). Part of the joy and mystery of a wonder tale is this arbitrary disregard for “...the rule that things must make sense” (Writer’s 69).

Closely related to intuitive logic is what Bernheimer refers to as normalized magic, the simple acceptance of enchantment with no expression of astonishment on the part of the hero. Of course the wolf can talk! Talking animals reflect the heart of normalized magic. Tolkien points out that the stories satisfy what he calls “primordial human desires” such as the ability to fly or talk to animals (Tolkien 18). Lüthi identifies this as the understanding that “everything can enter into relationship with everything else” (Lüthi 76). The storyteller uses the magic of words to create a separate world. “Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside” (Tolkien 36).

A close reading of Perrault’s narration of the encounter of LRRH with the wolf demonstrates that Bernheimer’s elements of form (flatness, abstraction, intuitive logic and normalized magic) are all clearly in play in *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*. The little girl is not surprised to meet a talking wolf in the woods, and she is not afraid of him. Perrault calls the animal “Compère Loup”, which Tatar translates as “Neighbor Wolf.” This seems similar to the “Brer” title in American Southern folk tales, as in Brer Fox or Brer Bear, implying relationship, but not necessarily kinship. Less formal than “Mister”, “Compère” is also translated sometimes as “Gaffer”, like “Grandpa” or “Old Man So and So”. This does not mean that the animal is tame or not dangerous. The neighbor here is still a wolf, the top predator in a forest other than bear (or human.)

Perrault gives us a rare glimpse inside a character's motivations when he tells the reader that the wolf "wanted to eat her right there on the spot" (Classic 12). Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp determined that in fairy tales, while most actions are motivated by plot functions, "Only villainy, as the first basic function of the folktale, is in need of some kind of supplementary motivation" (Propp 69). We also discover that a fear of near-by woodcutters is the only thing restraining the wolf from attacking the girl. This carnivorous intent is information that the audience has, but LRRH does not have. The secret knowledge of the beast's intentions heightens the stakes of their exchange for the audience. We are told that he wants to eat the girl, but there is nothing to indicate that course to her in the wolf's spoken words or actions.

Described as a "poor child" ("la pauvre enfant"), the little girl who walks through woods by herself is somehow unaware of the fact that listening to wolves is dangerous. The verb "listen" is key here, because it foreshadows Perrault's moral that plainly states young girls "are wrong to listen to just anyone," and it implies that the person to whom girls should listen is the storyteller. LRRH has come under the influence of a dangerous beast, but does not recognize that any peril could be present. She simply is not afraid. The child, clearly described as a "little girl" ("une petite fille"), does not hesitate to explain the location of grandmother's house to the predator. And the wolf instantly knows the two paths to get there, demonstrating that he is a local, and not just passing through. He does not try to persuade the girl to take her time and she is not concerned about

the likelihood of a wolf coming to grandmother's door. LRRH does not worry about whether or not it is a good idea to dawdle on the path, chasing butterflies and such. The narrative doesn't present any motivation for her flower-gathering as in "Granny might like a small bouquet." We only know her actions. In fact, according to Propp, "There is reason to believe that motivations formulated in words are alien to the folktale, and that motivations in general may be considered as newly formed phenomena" (Propp 69).

Considering the scene in Bernheimer's terms of flatness and abstraction casts light on other things we don't know here: what the woods look like, what country or season are we in, what color is the wolf, does he seem menacing or scary at all? Is he bigger than she is? Has she talked to wolves before? All we know about the girl is that she is pretty, adored by mother and grandmother, and known as Little Red Riding Hood because of the red hood (*chaperon*) her grandmother made for her. She is also obedient and evidently either fearless or dangerously naive. Little Red in this version is taking freshly baked cakes and a pot of butter to her granny. We don't even know whether or not she is carrying a basket!

Perhaps the most important thing that the reader does not know is the exact nature of this wolf. It's difficult to put a finger on, but there is something about this particular animal that draws attention. There are so many wolves in European fables and animal stories that the Latin proverb *wolfus in fabula* "the wolf in the fable" was used by writers like Cicero in the same way as "speak of



the devil.” Talking wolves abound in the folktale world, and the wolf is nearly always the representative of insatiable appetite. [Stith Aarne type for this story is #333, The Glutton.] In her book *Inside the Wolf’s Belly*, Joyce Thomas points out that animals are the most versatile players in fairy tales, and that few tales do not contain an animal. She makes distinctions between types of animals based on their roles in the tales, dividing them into the following categories: fabular, helpful, supernatural, and animal-human (Thomas 104). Most fairy tale animals are magical helpers or humans under an enchantment, but this wolf is not so easy to categorize.

The anomaly of the wolf in “Petit Chaperon Rouge” is not that he talks; it is that he is an animal antagonist pitted against a human protagonist. It’s abnormal and it’s intriguing. Even given the normalized magic of a talking animal in a fairy tale, we really don’t know why the girl is not afraid. There is no denying the power of the wolf to conjure at least caution in most humans. Thomas calls the wolf “the chief animal enemy of humanity during much of European history” (Thomas 116). Thomas also points out that this story could easily be turned into an animal story, so-called when all of the characters are animals that behave as humans. I think it is this particular conjunction of the human girl and the human-acting wolf with murderous intentions that provides the friction warranting investigation in LRRH.

Of course there is another term for a wolf with human traits or a human with wolfish traits: werewolf. Because, really, is a wolf in a story ever just a wolf? We humans have so many associations with the wolf. It seems rather obvious

that we project our fear of the beast within ourselves onto an animal that mates for life, nurtures its young, and shares its kill with the pack. While non-pejorative tales of humans shapeshifting into wolf form do exist, the majority of werewolf stories dwell on examples of terrible, sub-human behavior. In earlier times, some people believed in werewolves just as much as witches, and the Inquisition used the accusation of werewolf to burn men at the stake, although their interrogation methods may have contributed to the number of confessions. St. Augustine acknowledged that “it is generally believed that by certain witches’ spells and the power of the Devil men may be changed into wolves.” But he also insisted that the Devil had no power to physically change anything, and accomplished these transformations by illusion (Lycanthropy 6).

However, for the most part, the trials of accused werewolves did not require proof of transformation. The sensationalistic approach of historical documents to these trials gives evidence that the Big Bad Wolf has always made good copy. Peter Stump, “the werewolf of Bedburg,” was executed in Germany in 1589 for crimes of cannibalism and serial killing after confessing on the rack to being a werewolf. By 1590, a tabloid account of his torture, trial and grisly execution was already translated into English and being circulated in London (Lycanthropy 69). The Beast of Gévaudan, supposedly an enormous wolf, rampaged through the French countryside in 1764, killing and eating twenty people in that first year, primarily young girls out tending sheep. A Parisian bookseller rushed an illustrated pamphlet to press that same year, offering to

show readers the “face/of a ferocious and extraordinary animal/who devours girls/in the province of Gévaudan” (Telling Tales 271). The local Bishop of Mendes published his own cautionary/warning tale in a letter blaming the dead girls for being immodest and worldly: “That idolatrous and criminal flesh which serves as the Devil’s instrument to seduce and lose souls, does it not deserve to be delivered to the murderous teeth of ferocious Beasts who tear it apart and rend it to pieces” (Telling Tales 282)? Obviously, blaming the victim is not a new concept, but this letter also conflates the hunger of a predatory animal with the hunger of a human sexual predator, just as Perrault’s moral does. Why would a hungry wolf only be interested in eating female humans unless he were a werewolf?

The editors of *Folk and Fairy Tales*, Martin Hallett & Barbara Karasek, attribute the position of the warning tale in any storyteller’s repertoire as a response to the real world of the 15th century. They suggest that the strong belief of the time in werewolves and witches represents an attempt to explain irrational violence (F&FT 27). However, given the proliferation of werewolf stories in the 21st century, in spite of the general agreement that such things don’t exist, it could be that at least some of those folk in the Middle Ages were trying to understand their world in a metaphorical sense with stories, even though the Inquisition insisted on such bloody literalism. We still don’t want to believe that a “normal” person is capable of unspeakable savagery. The Inquisition had its own agenda for promoting hysteria about werewolves and witches in order to

eliminate undesirables and seize property. More restrained responses from civil courts show up as early as 1603, in the case of self-confessed werewolf Jean Grenier, who told the court he had eaten young girls and that the “Man of the Forest” had given him the required salve and wolfskin for transformation into a wolf. The court found him not guilty, stating that “the change of shape existed only in the disorganized brain of the insane,” although he was sentenced to life imprisonment in a monastery (Lycanthropy 51). Even King James I of England, a notoriously superstitious man, in his book *Daemonologie*, first published in Edinburgh in 1597, argued that a man who believed he actually transformed into a wolf was insane (Lycanthropy 103).

Neither Perrault nor the Grimms suggested in any way that the wolf in their stories was a werewolf. However, there was another version of the tale, collected by Paul Delarue in 1885, that is simply called “The Tale of Grandmother.” Even this variation has multiple versions with different endings, but the general frame has many similarities to “Rötkappchen” and “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge” with some important differences: a little girl taking bread to her granny meets a wolf who asks her which path she is taking, the path of needles or the path of pins? When the child arrives at granny’s, the wolf has killed the old woman and put her blood and flesh in the kitchen for her granddaughter to snack on. He instructs the girl to disrobe and get in bed. With the removal of each article of clothing, she asks where to put it and he responds “Throw it into the fire, my child. You won’t be needing it any longer.” Then follows a variation on the

quizzing about how big granny's shoulders, ears, and nostrils are. This time, when "the better to eat you with, child!" is the answer, the girl pretends she has to go outside to answer the call of nature. The wolf ties a length of wool to her leg, but the resourceful child ties the wool to a tree in the yard and runs safely home.

Interestingly, because it includes bodily functions and cannibalism, and because Delarue found dozens of variations of the tale in French-speaking areas, this version is considered to be closer to the oral tradition that the Grimms and Perrault were lifting from (Orenstein 69). It demonstrates an even higher degree of flatness and abstraction, given that the little girl has no red hat and no name. There are not even any flowers. One of the striking things about the tale is that although Tatar uses the word "wolf" in her translation, other translations insist that the word is not *loup* but *bzou*, an idiom for werewolf. That word would have been a clear indicator to the storyteller's audience that the girl is in mortal danger. The *bzou* asks the girl only two questions in the encounter scene, not needing to be told the location of granny's house. There has been speculation that the two paths perhaps are linked to a girl's maturation process, or refer to initiations into a sewing society, but the story just says, "the girl had fun picking up needles" (Classic 10). Of course the biggest difference to the feminist eye is that this little girl is not a victim and does not need rescuing by a passing huntsman. She is as much of a trickster as the devious man-wolf. This particular version illustrates Walter Benjamin's thought that in terms of a survival strategy, "the wisest thing...is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high

spirits,” which is exactly what our fearless heroine does in this tale (Illuminations 102).

If the Grimms heard this sort of oral tale before composing “Rötkappchen,” then they may have done just as much of a sanitizing whitewash as Disney ever has. Maria Tatar points out that with each edition of *Kinder und Haus-Marchen*, the Grimms focused more on children as their audience and progressively reduced allusions to sex, pregnancy or incest while increasing the violence quotient (Hard Facts 10). This reflects our own strange ratings system where a young person mustn’t be exposed to frontal nudity, but can watch any body being exploded or beaten. As imagery goes, being eaten and then reborn from the wolf’s belly is not particularly more violent than being given your grandmother’s blood and flesh to consume. But torturing an animal to death by sewing his stomach up after filling it with stones is quite a bit stronger than pulling the old “tie-the-rope-to-a-tree” trick.

In general, with the Grimms’ version of the encounter, we get more detail and description, although the elements of the form are still in play. There still is not much explanation of actions or character motivation other than the villain’s carnivorous thoughts towards the girl’s “tender” flesh. This wolf recognizes Little Red Cap and greets her politely by name. The grandmother’s poor health is emphasized more here, as Red explains she is carrying cake and wine to help her grandmother recuperate from being ill and feeble. This also reveals more motivation for the girl’s journey into the woods; she is playing the role of

caretaker. She tells the wolf very specifically that granny's cottage is another fifteen minutes deeper into the forest, under three big oak trees and identifiable by the border of hazels. This wolf introduces the little girl to the idea of admiring the flowers and listening to the birds in order to increase his chances of reaching Granny's house first. We do get another little window into Rötchkappchen's thoughts when she reflects on how happy her grandmother would be to get flowers and tells herself there is lots of time. And just like that, she strays from the path.

She left the path and ran off into the woods looking for flowers. As soon as she picked one she saw an even more beautiful one somewhere else and went after it, and so she went deeper and deeper into the woods. (Classic 14)

Much has been made of the Grimms' addition of LRRH being tempted by the wolf to stray from the path. There is a common and almost puritanical reaction on the part of some readers that somehow the little girl's action makes her complicit in the upcoming consumption. I think it is important to remember that while both "Rötchkappchen" and "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge" have the quality of timelessness, both are specific stories from a specific time, and both were crafted as teaching tales, although for different audiences. In her *Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon disagrees with the post-structuralist argument against giving any weight to the author's intentions when investigating reception of a work. It is certainly true for me that knowledge of the author's or artist's intention affects my response as an audience member. Hutcheon examines two opposing theories of narrative that suggest we must look at a story either as specific form of

representation which changes with time and location or as a “timeless cognitive model by which we make sense of our world and of human action in it.”

Adaptation and, I would argue, fairy tales in general, point to viewing any story as both “a specific cultural representation of a ‘basic ideology’ and as a general human universal” (Hutcheon 176).



## Chapter Two: Looking at Little Red Riding Hood

I've discussed Bernheimer's elements of fairytale form in regard to some traditional written versions (flatness, abstraction, intuitive logic and normalized magic) and examined how little information we actually get in three versions of LRRH. However, it would be disingenuous to say that I have no idea of what LRRH looks like. For that to be true, a person would have to be either literally blind or perhaps raised by wolves. Artists have been adding their own adaptations of this story for nearly as long as the written versions have existed. The strongest and perhaps most well-known illustrations of the tale are by Gustave Doré, a 19<sup>th</sup> century French artist famous not only for his paintings but equally for his illustrative interpretations of classics such as *Don Quixote*, *Paradise Lost*, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and even the Bible. Doré illustrated an edition of Perrault's tales in 1867 with his typical, very intricately detailed engravings printed in black and white. His close-up of an alarmed LLRH in bed with the "disguised" wolf became familiar in the 1970s as the cover for Bruno Bettelheim's influential book regarding the psychological benefits of fairy tales *The Uses of Enchantment*, although Bettelheim (or his art director) editorialized by adding a blush of color (desire? shame?) to the girl's cheek.

It's telling that Bettelheim used an illustration from Perrault's story, but only dwelt on the Grimms' version of the story in his analysis. The Grimms' *Rötkappchen* has definite precedence over Perrault's *Chaperon Rouge* in terms of general familiarity in the public mind. But the Doré illustrations must be

counted as among the most recognizable versions of LRRH, in spite of the absence of color. Doré's vision of the encounter could not be mistaken for anything but an illustration of this tale, yet there is no red cape, or even a cape at all. LRRH is wearing a soft cap that looks a bit like a slightly poofy beret. She is clearly a little girl, with soft, rounded features and limbs, and wears a short-sleeved, long-skirted frock with a practical apron around her waist, and flat shoes that buckle on with a strap. She is carrying a round loaf of bread and a ceramic jar with a rope handle. She gazes with fascination but without fear up into the eyes of a large wolf standing so close to her that he casts a shadow over her legs. This is an actual, four-legged beast, not some variety of man-wolf.

There is no visual space between LRRH's right arm and the wolf's back haunch, although it's not clear if they are touching each other. We see the wolf from behind, his furry pelt in great detail, tail down and ears up, and we can just catch from the angle of his head and a tiny flash of white that he is staring into the girl's eyes. The wolf is an overpowering presence in both in mass and in detailed darkness. Proportionately, the girl's shoulders are not quite as high as the wolf's back. The shagginess of his fur visually connects to the setting of the woods around the two characters. The tree trunks, leaves, undergrowth and shadows are all heavily textured with very fine crosshatching. Framed by shadowy foliage, the only pure white spaces in the illustration are LRRH's face, her plump forearm and gesturing hand (pointing toward the right side of the frame) and the edge of the bread loaf. The small indication of gesture is Doré's

“shorthand” letting the viewer know the two figures are conversing, although her mouth is closed and we cannot see the wolf’s mouth. The conjunction of the white arm and the white bread also brings a suggestion that both of these things are destined to be consumed.

Ironically, although this is a two dimensional representation and inherently flat, this illustration is much less “flat” in Bernheimer’s sense of the word than any of the three written versions examined thus far. It is the opposite of abstract. We get much more information and depth than are available in Perrault’s tale by having a visual image of the relative size and age of girl and wolf. Her neat clothing indicates a certain bourgeois status. We can see that the season is not fall or winter, and that the forest is old growth hardwoods. The element of normalized magic is present, as the girl is not particularly worried about conversing with a wolf. And the artist gives us one especially telling detail that can easily be overlooked by a casual glance: the little girl’s shoe is unbuckled. We already have the impression that the girl is in the presence of a powerful and possibly dangerous force; the shoe buckle tells us that whatever this encounter may bring, she is not prepared.

That one illustration can add so much and even change a story’s interpretation illustrates something beyond this story: the power of the visual. J.R.R. Tolkien, in his essay “On Fairy-Stories,” makes it clear that he prefers the reader to envision a tale with her own imagination. He does not find any value in illustration, noting that paintings of fantasy tend towards the silly or morbid and

illustrations of fairy tales prevent the listener/reader from finding the images in her own mind that resonate with the particular words. Tolkien's main concern is this:

The radical distinction between all art (including drama) that offers a visible presentation and true literature is that it imposes one visible form. Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive. It is at once more universal and more poignantly particular. If it speaks of bread or wine or stone or tree, it appeals to the whole of these things, to their ideas; yet each hearer will give to them a peculiar personal embodiment in his imagination. (Tolkien 67).

The author's anxiety about illustration is not misplaced. Doré's version of the encounter scene does impact the viewer's mental picture of what the girl, the wolf and the woods look like. However, I would argue that seeing the picture does not eliminate the viewer's personal imagery. An artist's illustration (or an actor's embodiment of a character) only fixes a visual image of that character if one is exposed to nothing but that one version. Otherwise, the piece of work functions as the artist's invitation to join an ongoing conversation about the material, "Come into my mind, let me show you how I see her." We may not like the standard portrayal of Disney's fairytale princesses as hyper-feminine, passive and helpless, for instance, but the problem of these interpretations is not the tendency of Walt Disney's personal agenda to reinforce the dominant paradigm. Every interpreter of a tale leaves traces of their own personality and their own time on the final product, Disney no more so than Perrault. Disney's vision is only a problem given a total absence of other models for a heroine's appearance and behavior in popular culture.

This notion of fairy tale adaptations in multiple media as a dialogue amongst many voices is not new. As an old Greek saying puts it: the fairy tale has no landlord. In Angela Carter's introduction to her 1990 collection *The Old Wives Fairy Tale Book*, she reinforces this idea:

Ours is a highly individualized culture, with a great faith in the work of art as a unique one-off, and the artist as an original, a godlike and inspired creator of unique one-offs. But fairy tales are not like that, nor are their makers. Who first invented meatballs? In what country? Is there a definitive recipe for potato soup? Think in terms of the domestic arts. 'This is how I make potato soup.' (Old Wives x).

Tolkien does not disagree with the analysis of fairy tales as having multiple sources and manifestations. In fact, he also refers to soup: "...The Cauldron of Story has always been boiling and to it have continually been added new bits..." (Tolkien 29). But Tolkien does not want the tales held up for ridicule. That seems to be his primary motivation in prohibiting visual artists or dramatic artists from adding to the soup. Writing in 1938, he deplores the attempt to depict fantasy on stage as hardly ever being successful. "Fantastic forms are not to be counterfeited. Men dressed up as talking animals may achieve buffoonery or mimicry but they do not achieve Fantasy" (Tolkien 46).

Keeping Tolkien's caution against buffoonery in mind, I'd like to explore Little Red Riding Hood's involvement in a theater piece that does call for "men dressed up as talking animals," yet can still manage to create a world of wonder and enchantment in the right hands. This example of fairy tale adapted for stage and screen is a musical called *Into The Woods*, written in 1986 by Stephen

Sondheim (lyrics and music) and James Lapine (script). Sondheim, it must be said, is a god of American theater. As a composer and lyricist, he is considered to be a master of the musical theater form. His body of work has won eight Tony Awards, eight Grammy awards, and he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for drama for his first collaboration with Lapine in 1985, *Sundays In The Park With George*. Many books are devoted to studying his work, and he has written several of his own. In his book, *Look, I Made A Hat*, Sondheim lays out the three principles underlying everything he does as a lyric writer: “Less is more, content dictates form, and God is in the details: all in the service of clarity without which nothing else matters” (Look xv).

The idea of content dictating form was put to the test when he and Lapine started thinking about their next musical after *Sundays In The Park With George*. They were interested in doing a quest musical like *Wizard of Oz*, and thought about doing a fairy tale, but realized “...fairy tales, by nature, are short; the plots turn on a dime, there are few characters and even fewer complications” (Look 57). The dearth of content in any one fairy tale led to Lapine’s conception of combining a number of classic tales into a mash-up that features Cinderella, Rapunzel, Jack (and the Beanstalk), and our girl Little Red Riding Hood. The stories are told in an intertwining fashion with some adherence to the traditional plots, but Lapine’s interest in “the little dishonesties that enabled the character to have their happy endings” motivated the creators to think about what might happen to the characters after those initial endings. Sondheim says that the

concept dictated the form of the first act going “up to the Happily and the second with the Ever After” (Look 58). In Act II, the characters in this piece all confront loss, grief and change in surprisingly sophisticated ways for fairytale characters in a musical.

*Into The Woods* is both a post-modern musical and a version of the sort of “fractured fairy tale” interpretations seen earlier in *The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show* of the early 1960s and later in Jon Scieszka’s short story collection *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* and DreamWorks’ animated comedy *Shrek*. The main characters are straight from Grimms’ fairy tales and in the first act, they follow their traditional plotlines with some minor variations. Overlapping four different stories helps solve the problem of the brevity of those plots, but combining the stories only takes the show up to the intermission. By that point, Cinderella is married to her prince, Jack is rich from the Giant’s treasure, Red has been eaten and rescued, and Rapunzel’s prince has found her in the tower. In Act II, Lapine and Sondheim examine the consequences of these characters having gotten their wishes in perhaps less than ethical ways. Cinderella realizes her prince is someone she doesn’t even know, Rapunzel loses her grip on reality, and the Giant’s wife climbs down another beanstalk to find her husband’s killer. Normalized magic continues to be featured in this post-modern kingdom; Cinderella can still talk to birds, for instance, and intuitive logic is used to resolve conflict. But as the characters face loss and mature through experience, they become more fully human, no longer abstract or flat.

Lapine created the two characters that tie the story together, the childless Baker and his Wife, who long for a child in classic fairytale style but are not from any particular tale. The fact that these two characters do not have proper names shows that Lapine did his research. In their quest to reverse the witch's curse of sterility, the Baker and his wife encounter the famous fairytale characters who have all gone into the woods, each of them in pursuit of their own wishes. But before their quest even begins, a certain red-caped young lady comes into their bakery.

In the collection of interviews called *Sondheim On Music*, Sondheim states that "Everybody in the show has a wish—wishing is the key character" (Horowitz 83). However, from reading the musical's script, LRRH does not seem to have her own wish in Act One. In her first scene at the Baker's house/shop, she only states a wish for a loaf of bread for her granny, although she expands on that with requests for sticky buns and pies. Her actions indicate that, just like the wolf, hunger is her dominating motivation. Lapine writes LRRH's hunger into the stage directions: "LRRH has been compulsively eating sweets at the Baker's house" and the notes also direct the actor to sing with her mouth full in that scene. The Baker's Wife tells her "Save some of those sweets for Granny" (TCG 9).

LRRH's main traits in Sondheim & Lapine's story (besides hunger) are fearlessness and blunt directness. She shocks the Baker and his wife when she tells them:



(lyrics)        Into the woods  
                  To bring some bread  
                  to Granny who  
                  is sick in bed.  
                  Never can tell  
                  What lies ahead  
                  For all that I know  
                  She's already dead. (TCG 10)

In her second scene, when she encounters the wolf in the woods, the dialogue follows the Grimms' version very closely. The two address each other formally, "Good day, young lady," and "Good day, Mr. Wolf." The wolf asks where she is going and what she has in the basket. She tells him she is taking bread and wine to help make her grandmother strong. When he asks where her grandmother lives, she answers specifically, "A good quarter of a league further in the woods; her house stands under three large oak trees" (TCG 24). The wolf simultaneously charms the girl and thinks about eating her, just as his character does in *Rötkappchen*, but in the musical, he gets an entire song "Hello, Little Girl" to expand upon his villainous motivations.

Having characters burst into song is standard procedure for the musical form. This overlaps in an intriguing way with the concept of normalized magic in fairytale form. We are in the same sort of separate world that Tolkien discusses, where according to the laws of that world, it is not only true that wolves can talk, it is also true that they can sing about their feelings!

So far, I have been discussing the script for *Into The Woods*, but the book and score for a musical are not the musical. The musical must be performed and

for that to happen, all of the collaborative arts of theater come into play. We learn different things experiencing the same story through different media. As Hutcheon points out, “performance mode teaches us that language is not the only way to express meaning or to relate stories” (Hutcheon 25). Choices must be made about the design of sets, costumes, make-up, casting, lighting, and props. Details such as how much orchestration to include or how many cast members join in a dance number affect the audience’s experience. Even where an actor stands to deliver a line can change meaning. In some sense, every participant in a piece of theater is also an adaptor.

The greatest challenge for a production of *Into The Woods* must be how to physically create a fairy tale world using live actors to present intuitive logic and normalized magic in ways that are simultaneously enchanting and acceptable to a 21<sup>st</sup> century adult audience’s sensibilities. There is a paradoxical situation for the audience: we know the fairytale characters, and we think we know what their stories are. For the performance to work, we also have to care what happens to these characters, which means they need to be more than just walking symbols. The Fiasco Theater Company, an actor-driven collective with a history of imaginatively stripped-down productions of Shakespeare, is a natural fit for reinterpreting this piece that was, by virtue of its content and its composer, an instant classic. Now the show is over 25 years old and still in revivals, marking it as an actual classic for Broadway. The latest Broadway revival by Fiasco will open at Roundabout Theater in December 2014 just as the Hollywood version of

*Into The Woods*, directed by James Campbell, is hitting movie theaters. I was fortunate enough to see the Fiasco production in its out-of-town run in San Diego prior to moving to NYC.

The general approach of Fiasco makes a virtue of necessity by creating low-tech solutions to big questions. They tend to expose the trick to the audience with a metatheatrical approach, revealing or even spotlighting the mechanism and somehow making the magic work in spite of that. In their production of *Into The Woods*, for example, the giant's booming voice is provided by an actor with an amplified megaphone who is on stage. The devouring scene inside granny's cottage is done in shadowplay by stretching cloth across a tripod ladder's front, placing the actors behind the cloth and backlighting them. The members of Fiasco manage to acknowledge the inherent goofiness of playacting on a stage and still apply the artist's dedication to craft and the theater geek's true belief in the power of imagination. They are playful, but they are not playing. They are knowing without being too snide or ironical, even with a script that is full of sarcasm and irony. The emotion created is real, and as an ensemble, Fiasco makes a space for that emotion. They're not afraid to get to the heart of things.

Immediately on seeing the set design by Derek McLane in San Diego's Old Globe Theater, the audience was cued that this was not going to be a traditional presentation of fairy tales. The whole upstage wall was masked not with curtains, but with bare ropes strung straight down and at varying angles from top to bottom. The ropes were of many different weights and were so abundantly

layered as to appear impenetrable in places. Strong side lighting cast very dramatic shadows from the ropes, furthering the suggestion of deep woods. The side wings were mostly concealed by large open metal frames mosaicked with the deconstructed guts and boards of old pianos. The floor was designed to appear both well-worn and unfinished, old wooden planks seemed to jut out raggedly from the edge of the proscenium, as if the builder had walked off the job some time ago or deliberately left the floor unfinished as it might be in the attic of an old house.

The rest of the set is supplied by the seemingly random objects stashed in this attic: some old wooden music stands, a partially disassembled upright piano center stage, a coatrack, a grandfather clock, a wooden tripod extension ladder, old furniture, boxes, instruments and heaps of fabric. In front of the piano is a small explosion of deep red ruffled fabric with a hank of braided yellow yarn laying on top next to one shiny gold high-heeled pump, very eye-catching on a stage dominated by muted browns and greys. The cast stays on stage nearly the whole show, and each actor has a base of operations carved out of the clutter. When not actually involved in the action, the actors are often at their seats playing acoustic instruments, taking on the role of orchestra.

Because every ensemble member does play multiple roles in this production, the costume designer Whitney Locher has facilitated the quick changes by starting each actor with a neutral base that is not particularly time-specific. The four female actors each wear a variation of an off-white dress that

could just as easily be an underdress or petticoat from the 1800s as from the 1930s or the 2010s. This non-specific time period helps capture the timeless quality of “once upon a time” and contributes to the element of flatness visually. At the show’s opening, the cast casually wanders on stage, checking props, greeting each other and audience members. In their neutral costumes, we don’t have any indication of who is playing what role. Before our eyes, the actors put on bits and pieces that indicate their characters for the opening number. The actress playing LRRH, Emily Young, appears to be in her twenties with a natural “no make-up” look and brown pigtails to lend a youthful air. To indicate the role of Red, she just adds brown mitts and, of course, a hooded cape of crimson red. Her other role of Rapunzel is indicated abstractly with the yellow yarn wig. This actor is a grown woman, but when she is playing Red, her affect transforms to that of a tough little girl, perhaps 10 or 11 in my mind.

For the encounter scene, Red’s youthfulness is emphasized when she follows the script’s stage directions to skip in to center stage. The central area is mostly empty at this point, with one male actor standing upstage in dim lighting and facing away from the audience. The piano plays the “Into the Woods” theme as the girl enters. The lighting is slightly dappled to give the impression of daylight coming through tree leaves. On one arm, Red carries the basket with pastries and a bottle of wine she snatched from the Baker. With the other hand, she is busy shoving a pastry in her mouth. When she pauses center stage to

chew, the downstage actor whirls around to reveal the Wolf (to audience applause.)

To provide some context, in the original Broadway production captured on video in 1987, the actor playing the Wolf is half man, half wolf, much taller than the sixteen-year-old girl playing Red. His close-fitting furry pants are tucked into striped socks and a glam purple and silver-lapelled jacket with tails that somewhat conceal his tail. A prosthetic wolf's muzzle blends with his features. There's extra not-very-ambiguous phallic fur in his crotch area, and his hairy, chiseled bare chest prosthesis extends far down towards his groin. He's even got a rock star mane of hair that doesn't quite hide the wolf ears. He is clearly meant to be a sexy beast, but cannot avoid a certain cartoonish quality.

In the Old Globe production, Fiasco actor and director Noah Brody plays the Wolf with no mask or animal make-up, his only additional costuming a pair of long black gloves. Aside from the gloves, he wears his neutral base costume of white long-sleeve Henley t-shirt, tan plaid long pants with suspenders, and brown shoes. In his hands, he holds what appears to be a realistic taxidermied wolf's head, mounted on a wooden plaque. The back of the plaque features a leather strap so the head can be held on one forearm if needed. This is a perfect example of rendering an abstract character concretely, while preserving the abstract nature. In the hands of Brody, the dead wolf's head somehow becomes a life-sized puppet. The actor holds the head waist-high to the girl, keeping that height consistently below the girl's head, reinforcing the suggestion that this is an

actual talking wolf as opposed to a man-sized wolf on two legs or some sort of werewolf. He speaks first, “Good day, young lady” and Red answers calmly, “Good day, Mister Wolf.” She continues to chomp on her pastry while the Wolf questions her, following the Grimms’ dialogue nearly verbatim. As the Baker says later in the show, “You can’t frighten her!”

Singing the number “Hello Little Girl”, accompanied only by the piano and a guitar, Brody manipulates the wolf’s head in ways that suggest the behavior of a friendly dog; circling, rubbing the animal head against Red’s waist, it seems more sensual than sexual because the actors are not touching each other. The song lyrics alternate between verses directed to the girl about taking time to appreciate the birds and the flowers and verses that expound on the information that a reader gets from the narrator in the written version -- that the wolf is planning to eat the girl and her grandmother. Following theatrical convention, the asides that indicate the character is talking to himself can be heard by the audience, but not by the other characters on stage. The wolf’s face stays focused on Red even when the actor turns his face to the audience for direct addresses during the song, enhancing the impression of access to the character’s thoughts. By the song’s end, Red is convinced to indulge her appetite for beauty and sings “Granny might like a small bouquet,” providing the same motivation given by the Grimms. She exits cheerfully on her line “Good-by, Mister Wolf!” His “Good-by, little girl” is polite enough, but the final image is the wolf’s

head concealing the actor's face as he emits a bloodcurdling howl. Very different than the friendly canine! The lights go out in a rare and sudden blackout.

One must acknowledge that it is not entirely fair to compare a live performance with a film of a live performance. The quality of "liveness" provides its own magic with an unseen but real energy exchange between audience and performer that is missing in film. Playwright Jez Butterworth recently compared the experience of watching a filmed version of a live play to being told about a really good dinner party (*New Yorker* 11/10/24). Nonetheless, the absurd appearance of the 1987 videotaped stage *Wolf* is exactly what Tolkien was warning against. By not trying to make the actor resemble a wolf, *Fiasco* provides a much more convincing quality of "wolfness" that redirects the audience's attention to the danger of the girl being actually eaten, not sexually attacked.

In the video, the *Wolf* steps back to start his song as he observes Red in a lascivious manner, stroking his thighs, wiping his mouth, just as directed in the script's stage directions. When the *Wolf* addresses Red directly, he actually grabs her, turning her around and guiding her in a tango step. He keeps hold of her hand when she pulls back, and each time he sings to her, he grabs her again and pulls her against his chest. Lapine and Sondheim, along with the costume designer, the director and the choreographer have definitely weighted this two-legged man-wolf towards the man side indicated by Perrault's moral. Even though we are in a fairytale world, the *Wolf's* blatant, over-the-top sexuality and



the close physical contact with a young teenager bring some discomfort to the viewer, raising questions about the Wolf's end goal.

Of course, Sondheim and Lapine are not the first, nor the last to associate rape and pedophilia with the story of Little Red Riding Hood. Those associations have been there at least since Perrault, and recently (2011), the pilot for the supernatural drama *Grimm* featured a spin on LRRH with the wolf as a very disturbing sort of werewolf-pedophile-serial killer. Even more recently, the first disclosed photos from the upcoming Hollywood *Into The Woods* raised anxiety in one blogger who worried that the youth of the actress playing LRRH (13-year-old Lilla Crawford) implied pedophilia on the part of the wolf played by much-older Johnny Depp (i09 10/24/14). It's difficult to avoid that association when the wolf is being presented as a sexual, macho beast. I suspect that Depp's request for costume designer Colleen Atwood to model his wolf outfit on Tex Avery's zoot-suit-wearing wolf cartoon character from the 1940s is partly an attempt to diffuse the serious sexual predator vibe (EW 22). With the rest of the film's cast in vaguely Renaissance-era costumes, the zoot suit also signals that this character is different. I expect Depp to bring much more trickster and less macho to the role.

The latest Triangle-area production of *Into The Woods* by Playmakers Repertory (running through 12/7/14) features an equally interesting costuming choice for the wolf. Costume designer Bill Brewer created a 1950s"ish" look for the show and put the wolf in tight black leathers reminiscent of Elvis Presley, but

topped the outfit with a large and fantastical full-head wolf's mask. In spite of actor Gregory DeCandia's suggestive pelvic thrusts, the mask kept the tone playful, and Jessica Sorgi as LRRH is such a strong comedic actor that she seemed perfectly able to handle the situation, even when she was seemingly thrown off-balance by the wolf spinning her around. In both Fiasco's and Playmakers' versions, the fact that LRRH is an adult playing a girl also lessens the disturbing implications of pedophilia. It seems very clear that the girl's age and the wolf's appearance are hot topics that must be seriously considered by any artist considering visual adaptations of Little Red Riding Hood.

### Chapter Three: The Wolf's Companion

It is perhaps self-evident, yet still seems worth pointing out that with the exception of two costume designers, all of the adaptors of LRRH that I have looked at are men. I seem to remember comedian Sarah Silverman suggesting that if the Catholic Church wanted to cut down on the “rapey-ness” of their culture, they might want to look at including a few more women. It is not a coincidence that a woman wrote this next piece I want to examine, an adaptation that abandons the whole conception of LRRH as a helpless victim.

Angela Carter's short story, *The Company of Wolves*, at just nine pages long, is already three times longer than the Grimms' *Rötkappchen*. Carter is an extremely visual and highly stylized writer, whose post-modern approach often incorporates a multitude of genres. She conjures startling images that seem to be the opposite of flat and abstract, and yet she is definitely writing fairy tales in her short story collection *The Bloody Chamber*. Carter riffs on the fairy tale canon throughout the book, improvising on animal bridegroom stories, Bluebeard, and even Puss-in-Boots. Fairytale scholar Jessica Tiffin observes that Carter's elaborate writing style and her intertextual borrowing from various genres keeps the reader constantly aware of the artificiality of the written word itself, and thus “achieves a back-door route to the inherent metafictionality signaled by fairy tale's ‘Once upon a time,’ dexterously juggling the difficult tension between

metafictional excess of style and the necessary timelessness and lack of detail fairy tale requires” (Tiffin 80).

If that explanation seems a bit convoluted, perhaps that’s because it is. On the other hand, Andrew Teverson, in his survey of the current state of literary criticism looking at fairy tales, mentions another critic that I regret not having yet read. Evidently Elizabeth Harries’ book *Twice Upon A Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* disrupts the whole model of fairy tale as universally compact, flat and abstract. According to Teverson, Harries points out that there is a whole other tradition in fairy tale that is more complex and self-referential and includes writers such as d’Aulnoy, Basile, Anderson and Carter (Teverson 37). The fairytale form itself is a shapeshifter. That Carter’s intricate, lush narratives are still clearly identifiable as fairy tales is also a tribute to both the familiarity and elasticity of the genre; the tales retain their identity and absorb new interpretations.

One way Carter expands and expounds upon the tale of LRRH is by including multiple scenarios of human/werewolf interactions. *The Company of Wolves* is really a collection of werewolf stories in itself, several of them borrowed from the writings of the French judge Henri Bouget, who presided over werewolf trials in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Carter starts by immersing the reader in a wintry world filled with mountains, forests, and wolves. “Fact” blends with fiction about the top predator in the woods, letting the reader know personally that “you are always in danger in the forest, where no people are” and that “if you stray from the path for

one instant, the wolves will eat you” (Carter, p111). Carter quickly sets the atmosphere with embedded micro-stories about a woman bitten in her own kitchen, a hunter who accidentally traps a werewolf, a witch who vengefully turns a whole wedding party into wolves, a woman in “our village” whose husband disappears on their wedding night and returns years later as a werewolf. The folksy, oral style creates the impression that the local storyteller is catching you up on all the regional wolf lore, so you understand clearly that, for instance, “Before he can become a wolf, the lycanthrope strips stark naked. If you spy a naked man among the pines, you must run as if the Devil were after you” (Carter 113).

Not until a third of the way into the story are we introduced to the Little Red Riding Hood theme. Carter uses present tense and no names, but gives much more description than Perrault or the Grimms. The girl is a “strong-minded child” whose “breasts have just begun to swell” and has “just started her woman’s bleeding” (Carter 113). We are told she is pretty and blonde, wearing wooden shoes and the thick shawl knitted by her grandmother “that, today, has the ominous if brilliant look of blood on snow.” Along with oatcakes, brandy, jam and cheese for her grandmother, she carries a large carving knife in her basket as protection against wolves, but “she has been too much loved ever to feel scared.” At the point that she leaves home and enters the woods, the narration switches into past tense. “The forest closed upon her like a pair of jaws” (Carter 114). It seems to be a foregone conclusion that this girl will be eaten.

The encounter scene in this tale is quite different from Grimm or Perrault. Although the girl is ready to defend herself with her knife when she hears a distant wolf's howl and then a rustling, what emerges from the brush is not a wolf, but a handsome young man, "dressed in the green coat and wideawake hat of a hunter" (Carter 114). Other than these sartorial details, the description remains abstract: he is simply "a fine fellow" and "a dashing huntsman." However, because Carter has already prepared the reader with multiple werewolf tales, and because the girl is wearing a red cape and going to grandmother's house, the reader instinctively knows that somehow this is the wolf.

The hunter bows to the girl and flirts with her, promising to protect her with his rifle as he takes her basket to carry. He shows her the "remarkable object in his pocket" which is a compass, (not what you might think!) and evidently a new piece of technology in the area. There are no questions about her destination or the location of granny's cottage. The hunter proposes a contest to see who can get to granny's the quickest: him cutting through the woods with his compass to guide him, or her staying on the path. They settle on a kiss as the prize if he gets there first, and when they part, she dawdles on the way "to make sure the handsome gentleman would win his wager" (Carter 115). By leaving with the basket, the hunter has literally disarmed her. She is alone in the woods, it is getting dark and starting to snow, but she is so enraptured by her new acquaintance that she is no longer worried about wolves.

Aside from the context of a girl in red and in the woods, what we don't get is any indication that this hunter is other than what he seems. We are given some access to interior space for the girl; she absolutely knows she must never leave the path, for example, but the hunter remains opaque. Earlier in the pre-story, the reader is warned to identify werewolves "by their eyes, those phosphorescent eyes...the eyes alone unchanged by metamorphosis" (Carter 113). Carter does not tip off the reader with any mention of the hunter's eyes in the encounter scene. There is one indirect clue: the second time she describes the hunter laughing, he has "gleaming trails of spittle" clinging to his white teeth. Aside from that rather disturbing yet sensual detail, the hunter is amusing and has good manners, comparing very favorably to the "rustic clowns of her native village" (Carter 114). In other words, he is a flat and abstract character such as you might expect to meet in a fairy tale.

Because Carter's version is less familiar, and because I love it best, I hope you will indulge my delving past just the encounter. In contrast with the next scene, the absence of descriptive detail in the encounter heightens the reader's awareness that this young, naïve girl is perhaps encountering the first man for whom she has felt a physical attraction. (Carter has already explicitly stated earlier that the girl is a virgin.) The moment the hunter enters the cottage of the grandmother, granny knows he is a werewolf by his eyes: "...eyes of a beast of prey, nocturnal, devastating eyes as red as a wound" (Carter 115). The narrative switches tense again, throwing the reader into the present and giving us the

grandmother's perspective as she throws her bible, then her apron at the werewolf, calling on Christ for protection. Now Carter completely leaves the fairytale form described by Lüthi and Bernheimer, indulging in the extravagant description at which she excels. Granny watches so closely as the man-wolf takes off his hunter's hat and coat that she can see the lice moving in his hair, and knows that "night and the forest has come into the kitchen with darkness tangled in its hair." He strips off his shirt and trousers to expose his nipples "dark as poison fruit", hairy legs, and "genitals, huge. Ah! huge." And then the tense switches back: "The last thing the old lady saw in all this world was a young man, eyes like cinders, naked as a stone, approaching her bed" (Carter 116).

In spite of the lush detail of his disrobing, the consuming of the grandmother is accomplished in one, oblique sentence: "The wolf is carnivore incarnate." We get one hint that the man transformed into a wolf when he is described as licking his chops after he is finished with her. Carter lets the reader fill in for herself what has happened between the approach to the bed and the chop-licking. Evidently all he needs to do to resume human shape is put his clothes back on, which he does. There is no doubt, however, that the old woman has been eaten; all that is left is bones and hair, which he carefully tidies away. This wolf even changes the sheets on the bed! The story continues with Perrault's storyline when the girl arrives, and this time does notice his burning eyes. This gives a new twist to the old line, delivered flatly "What big eyes you have." There is also homage to Perrault's moral: as the girl sees a tuft of her



granny's hair in the fire, she realizes she is "in danger of death," and remembers "the worst wolves are hairy on the inside." Carter turns to *The Tale of Grandmother* by having the girl strip, throwing each item of clothing on the fire as directed by the bzou "Throw it on the fire, dear one. You won't need it again" (Carter 117).

Not until the last page of the story does Carter completely derail the old tale's various tracks. The "wise child" approaches the werewolf directly and gives him the promised kiss of her own free will. She is fearless, "since her fear did her no good." She delivers the traditional line "What big teeth you have!" with the intimate knowledge of having just kissed the beast, and when he gives the expected response, she laughs: "she knew she was nobody's meat" (Carter 118). She rips off his shirt and burns it, thereby destroying his path back to human form. Carter ends her fairy tale with this image: "See! sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf." By abandoning fear and addressing her own desire directly, the girl achieves union with the wild animal, rather than death by consumption. She does not need rescuing.

Carter's short story was part of her collection of adapted fairy tales titled *The Bloody Chamber* first published in 1979. It was one of four collections of short stories, along with nine novels that she managed to publish during her short life. (She died in 1992 at the age of 51.) In 1996, her literary executor published *The Curious Room: Plays, Film Scripts and an Opera* which includes both a radio script and a screenplay for *The Company of Wolves*, the latter written in tandem

with director Neil Jordan (*The Crying Game*, *Interview with the Vampire*). Her executor, in the introduction, describes Carter's radio plays as having been quite successful (Curious ix). *The Company of Wolves* radio play was first broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in 1980, featuring a nine-person cast, including a narrator.

Carter identified herself as "a child of the Radio Age" and discussed her attraction to the medium of radio: "The way the listener is invited into the narrative to contribute to his or her own way of 'seeing the voices and the sounds, the invisible beings and events, that gives radio story-telling its real third dimension, which is the space that, above all, interests and enchants me" (Curious 497). Carter pointed out that radio can play with time and space and montage effects far more easily than film, not only because of the enormous expense of film-making, "but also because the eye takes longer to register changing images than does the ear." She thought of radio as even more nuanced than text because "the rich textures of radio are capable of stating ambiguities with a dexterity over and above that of the printed word; the human voice itself imparts all manner of subtleties in its intonations" (Curious 500). And she seemed to agree with Tolkien when she stated "...no werewolf make-up in the world can equal the werewolf you see in your mind's eye." The author considered the adaptation to radio as a "reformulation" that turned her re-imagined fairy tale into the more specific genre of horror story.

In adapting the short story to radio, Carter redistributes the narrative, assigning a small part of the text to an unnamed narrator, and giving more lines

to Granny and her granddaughter in order to create the story's world. She adds specific sound effects, wolves howling, of course, but also wind, crackling fire, fluttering wings and whatever else is called for by the text to place the listener in the cottage or in the woods. Granny becomes the storyteller as she knits the red shawl with the anonymous Little Red Riding Hood as her audience, introducing the embedded stories that then transition into re-enactments by other voices. More specific details are added than in the text of the short story; LRRH announces her age as twelve, for example, but states that she has not yet begun to bleed.

For the encounter in the radio play, LRRH thinks out loud as she walks the forest path. Sound effects called for include birdsong, footsteps, crows cawing, wings flapping, undergrowth rustling. The hunter character is clearly labeled "Werewolf" in the script, and the girl describes how he looks as if she were talking both to herself and answering her Granny's warnings in her head. The script enhances the short story's description, becoming less abstract with her comments such as "It took a gentleman's gentleman to give this gentleman's boots that shine," and "he is such a handsome fellow for all his eyebrows do grow close together" (Curious 75). This gives much more of a visual picture than the short story, introducing the idea that this werewolf is perhaps an aristocrat and, at the same time, informing the audience that the girl is wise to the concealed nature of the hunter. Carter continues to play her curious tricks with tense. As the scene unfolds, the dialogue between girl and wolf is in present tense, but

LRRH is also narrating in the past tense to the unseen audience, “Now, this young man had the most remarkable object in his pocket, which he brought forth to show me” (Curious 75). In the radio play, we become privy to the werewolf’s thoughts as well: “how white her skin must be, as white as breast of chicken, succulent as loin of pork.” When he asks her for a kiss as a reward, he comments out loud, in an aside to himself, “How she’s blushing, like blood leaking into the snow” (Curious 76). The radio script obviously must tell rather than show; however, Carter’s words create such strong imagery that we can understand why she believed radio to be “the most visual of mediums because you cannot see it” (Curious ix).

For radio, Carter continues to be more specific than for short story form when the werewolf reaches the cottage. It is Granny that describes the man’s body as he strips before the female gaze, but the Narrator breaks in with “she witnessed the unimaginable metamorphosis, the coarse, grey, the tawny bristling pelt springing out from the bare skin of her visitor...great jaws slaving... ” (Curious 77). By having the werewolf comment afterwards on the quality of granny’s sinewy flesh, the ambiguity of the short story is completely removed. It is all too clear that Granny has been consumed by a man in wolf’s form. The radio audience can visualize based on what they hear, providing that third dimension, but a script that is too ambiguous would be frustrating rather than intriguing.

The screenplay for the film of *The Company of Wolves* is forced to abandon even more textual ambiguity and fairytale abstractness due to the strictures of the medium. This form, of course, is meant as a guide for the film, not as a piece of literature, and a film gives very specific visuals. As veteran editor Walter Murch says on the problems of adapting novels into film:

The obvious truth about film is that it's highly redundant visually. In *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert describes Emma Bovary's eyes and refers to their colour perhaps three other times. On film, every single frame of Isabelle Huppert's eyes says, This is the colour of her eyes, or, This is how her hair is, this is her costume. (Ondaatje 126).

Much of the emphasis given by Carter's luscious language must be translated into ways for the camera to guide the audience's eyes without words. The screenplay for a feature-length film has expanded the 9-page short story to become a 58-page script. The scene shots are described in the screenplay to a much greater extent than any description is given in short story or radio play (at least until the werewolf meets the grandmother.) In the encounter scene, for example, we learn from the stage directions of the werewolf's appearance:

a tall, handsome young man, so handsome you do not notice his eyebrows almost meet. He is wearing full, nineteenth-century hunting gear, almost to excess – like a Victorian fashion plate of a sportsman. Hat with feathers of game birds in the ribbon; Norfolk jacket; breeches; boots. Gun over his shoulder, a brace of pheasants dangling from his hand. He has emerged like an apparition of grace and elegance.

This kind of description serves as a precursor to what the audience will experience in the film, although a certain element of abstractness remains that will disappear on screen. There are many ways to be handsome, for instance,

and we are not told the color of his eyes or of his clothes. Those are details that will be added by the costume designer and by the actor's appearance.

Nonetheless, one visual indicator of vital import has been added to the stage direction that was included in the radio play: the man's eyebrows "almost meet." This detail is dwelt upon as an indicator of the werewolf in one of the embedded micro-stories featured in the short story, the radio play and the screenplay.

In order to create a fairytale world, the screenplay adapts elements of the short story in non-verbal ways. The consistent inconsistencies with both the time period setting and the physical world reflect Carter's style in the original story. Sometimes the woods are real, as they are in the encounter scene. Sometimes they are transformed into a nightmare forest, with highly exaggerated shadows and surreally large broken toys and stuffed animals dominating the landscape. The LRRH character does have a name, Rosaleen, but she seems to travel through time, as the different stories from the short story are introduced. The screenplay begins in the "now", that is the 1980s, and we know that because it describes a new Volvo estate car driving down a country road. We meet a modern family living in a Georgian house with extensive grounds, slightly rundown. Following what may be a dream sequence in the nightmare forest, the elder daughter appears to actually have been eaten by wolves, but her funeral is described by the screenplay as being attended by peasants "out of any number of fairy-tales, redolent of the late-eighteenth century, perhaps, the world of the Brothers Grimm" (Curious 189). In this timeless time period, Rosaleen is taken

home by her grandmother and Granny tells her cautionary tales while knitting, just as in the radio play. Similarly to the radio play, Granny's narration dissolves into scenes of the stories she is telling, which slide in and out of various time periods. One werewolf story is set in generic "medieval" world; another has a boy meeting the Devil to receive the transformational werewolf ointment, but the Devil is riding in a white Rolls Royce.

This sense of dislocation in time and surreal abstraction continues in details throughout the screenplay. The "18<sup>th</sup> century" Rosaleen walks in the woods with her peasant would-be boyfriend and climbs a tree to playfully hide from him. The stage directions describe her discovery of a nest with eggs and a small mirror in it. The description includes her taking an anachronistic lipstick from her pocket and painting her mouth, then watching as the eggs burst open to reveal tiny human babies. In another envisioning of one of the short story's tales-within-a-tale, the setting and costumes are described as elaborately mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. These kinds of abstraction are reflected in the encounter scene. Rosaleen has just repainted her mouth with lipstick, stretching her lips flat with "a snarl," but the werewolf character (named as "Hunter" in the script) is described as wearing Victorian clothes.

As is logical for translation to a visual medium, the descriptive dialogue from the radio play has been excised and visual detail has been added to the stage directions. More action has been added to the scene: the two sit down to picnic on the basket's contents, and Rosaleen uses the carving knife to smear

red jam on an oatcake, then the hunter playfully forces her to take a bite. And the narrative is expanded when the hunter starts yet another wolf story with the words “Many years ago...” and the scene dissolves to another setting for his story. After his tale of a girl raised by tender wolves, the encounter scene resumes with a sexually-charged tussle on the ground between girl and hunter, ending with the challenge of who can get to Granny’s first. Intuitive logic is still at play here as there is no explanation of how the hunter would know where Granny lives. However, as we’ll see in the close analysis, the hunter’s wolf story gets cut from the final version of the film encounter scene in order to keep the focus on the rising sexual tension between girl and hunter.

Comparing the screenplay to the film itself demonstrates the multitude of changes that take place between page and screen. For all of Carter’s equal credit with director Neil Jordan on the screenplay, she was not part of the final decision-making process for the film. There were a variety of concrete decisions made before the cameras even started rolling. For instance, according to the entry in the Internet Movie Data Base ([imdb.com](http://imdb.com)) for the film version of *The Company of Wolves*, production designer Anton Furst studied the works of Gustave Doré to inform his design of the forest scenes. Those scenes were all shot on sets built on stage in Shepperton Studios in England. The actress playing Rosaleen, Sarah Patterson, really was twelve years old at the time. Jordan had requested a sixteen-year-old actress for the part, but because Sarah auditioned so well, he rewrote parts of the screenplay in order to be able to cast



the young girl, toning down some of the sexuality between her and the hunter. The role of the hunter/werewolf is played by choreographer Micha Bergese, initially hired to help with the physicality of the werewolf characters. Once Jordan saw him in action, he decided to keep him in the role of the hunter.

The Little Red Riding Hood narrative does not begin until an hour into the movie. The Rosaleen character sets off into the woods to take treats to her grandmother wearing an outfit that suggests the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with a full ankle-length skirt of heavy golden-brown material and a matching corset top over a white undershirt. Her full-length, finely knitted red wool cape has the requisite hood, and her dark brown hair is partially braided away from her face, with most of it falling in long, loose curls that have definitely been produced by a hairspray-wielding stylist. She looks slightly older than her real age of 12, and is clearly wearing lipstick, a recurring theme in the film, although the rest of her face has the “no make-up” look. The constructed woods have the appearance of heightened reality: extremely large grey tree trunks with big, gnarled roots exposed and everything blurred by fairly heavy mist. The lighting is diffuse and low-key, with no distinguishable source. The camera is mostly moving with her in a tracking shot as she walks, shooting in wide angle through thin, ice-covered branches, as if we are watching her from behind some shrubbery, but occasionally there are cuts to include random animals: a white rabbit, then a large boa constrictor-looking snake, then a particularly slimy frog get quick close-ups as she walks. The animal close-ups contribute to the slightly surreal

atmosphere; we know that a frog would not be out in the snow, yet here it is, before our very eyes. Rosaleen seems intrigued, but not surprised, an indicator of the intuitive logic that has led her into the woods by herself.

There is atmospheric music playing, mostly low strings. A chiming sound startles Rosaleen while she is kneeling to examine the frog and she rises out of the camera's frame, knife in hand. The camera pulls back to get her in the frame from waist to head, circles around her, then follows her as she back away, bumping into a man. She gives a startled gasp, and whirls around. The camera is shooting from behind the man's shoulder, then cuts to a shot from over Rosaleen's shoulder, giving a full view of the man from waist to head. He is clean-shaven, brown-haired, brown-eyed, with highly-defined cheekbones and eyebrows that slightly meet in the middle. (Foreshadowing!) He wears a white cravat and blue-green velvet brocade vest and coat heavily embroidered with sparkling gold sequins and silver thread. His hair is tied back with a large black bow, and also rather obviously hairsprayed. (This is an 80s film, after all, but it may be deliberately anachronistic.) He has just removed his matching tricorne hat. The costume design gives a much stronger suggestion of aristocrat than hunter, and seems to nod toward Perrault's own setting of the Sun King's court.

Their dialogue begins, "Miss?" "Where did you spring from?" "Did I scare you? I am sorry." "At least you've got your clothes on." This line reveals that Rosaleen has absorbed her granny's stories about the dangers of werewolves, which makes her failure to notice the eyebrows a bit mysterious, although

ambiguous may be a more accurate word. The glittering of the man's costume, his sophisticated handsomeness, lithe movement and courtly manners may serve to excuse what is either her oversight or her deliberate courting of danger. He is literally enchanting to behold, in spite of the hairspray. The camera stays close on the couple framing them from the shoulders up, they are standing only a foot or two apart. The depth of field is shallow, with the background woods out of focus, and the characters are no longer obscured by mist. The lighting has become stronger, seemingly overhead and from the left. He circles her, picking up her basket, and the camera tracks behind him, showing that he has a rifle and two dead pheasants slung over his shoulder. The dead birds visually underline the presence of the predator, in contrast to the living animals observed by Rosaleen. He takes her knife, then her arm as he tells her he knows a good place for a picnic. She keeps her eyes on his, looking cautious, but unafraid as they step toward the camera. The eye contact seems to quote Doré's illustration, much as the design of the woods does. A random extreme close-up of the frog is spliced in, then the film cuts to a wide angle shot of the two characters seated on the ground. The frog has to be intentional, and the emphasis makes it seem symbolic, but it's difficult to say of what. Fertility? Sliminess? General weirdness? It serves to keep the artificiality of the film centered in the consciousness of the audience, which may be the whole point. The camera focus is romantically soft again, either from mist or a filter on the camera lens, and the shooting angle is again situated behind some small branches. Rosaleen

is nestled against a huge tree trunk. The whole scene is grey and white around the two, with the red cape glowing.

As they chat, they lean towards each other, and the camera moves left, staying behind shrubbery, then moving in close for an unobstructed view when the hunter gets up to sit down again next to Rosaleen. The focus is still soft, but the shot is in extreme close-up, as the hunter teases her with an oatcake, finally putting one end in his mouth and leaning in for her to take one quick, small bite before she turns away. The framing of the shot give the viewer nowhere to look except at their mouths and the biting action. This action shows without a word that the girl is a knowing participant in this seduction scene, and it was not described in any of the previous written versions. That sort of telling detail is why Linda Seger, in her book *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction Into Film*, states “Film is the director’s medium, dependent upon the images and contexts that surround the actor” (Seger 40).

The scene continues as the camera stays in close, cutting back and forth on the actors’ faces in extreme close-up as they banter about the compass, the woods, and the wolves. When Rosaleen casually says, “You must know that the worst wolves are hairy on the inside,” with all her knowledge of werewolf lore, perhaps she is teasing him, revealing that his true nature has been recognized. The hunter reacts strongly, mocking her for believing in old wives’ tales, as he kneels, touches her hair, takes her hand, pulls her up to kneeling, saying “You...deserve...to be...punished!” then grabs her in a clench and throws her

down on the ground with him on top. The movement is blurred, then the camera focuses on her face as she giggles and he laughs. They become still. As she gazes into his eyes without any protest, what we see resembles any number of Hollywood love scenes. The music plays an ominous chord, continuing with a low melody. The close-up is so tight that their heads are not completely contained in the frame. The hunter says, "I'll show you I'm not afraid of the wolves, Rosaleen" as he proposes the challenge of who can reach granny's house first. This could be a continuity error, since she has not given him her name. But it also could be a reference back to intuitive logic and the Grimms' version where the wolf greets Rötchkappchen by name. "Bet me your compass?" "Bet you your heart's desire." "If I lose?" "You can...give me...a kiss." As he moves even closer to her lips, the camera cuts away to a wide shot, returning to its hiding place in the bushes. The music stops and the tension is defused as Rosaleen gasps and pushes the hunter away, sitting up while the camera circles left slowly. The still nameless hunter gives her his hat as token of good faith and exits the frame with his birds and gun in hand while she remains centered, kneeling and looking at herself in a small mirror. She is first facing away from the camera, then the film cuts to an over-the-shoulder close-up so we see what she sees, her face in the mirror. The camera pulls back to a wide angle as she rises and exits from the frame to the right. The snow starts falling and the shot dissolves as the music comes back in.

In the screenplay and in the film, the transformation scene at Granny's has also been completely reworked to include more action, less description, less male nudity and more surreal elements. The screenplay completely eliminates the initial male strip scene and uses stage directions to describe the werewolf changing, "the skin splitting away to reveal the wolf beneath." Sadly, the 1980s special effects technology reinforces what both Carter and Tolkien warned against in representing fantasy. This metamorphosis in the film is lingered on for far too long, and does not hold up particularly well to the contemporary eye, although I recall it as being fairly horrific in a slimy way at the time.

Instead of showing the old woman actually being killed and eaten as we are told in the radio play, the werewolf literally knocks her head off of her body in the script and the film. (Granted, he has been provoked.) The head is described as looking like a china doll's head, and when it hits the wall in the film, it does shatter into shards of china. It may be that a consideration of ratings factored into this decision to keep bloodless what could have been a truly gory scene, but it also keeps the action focused on the interactions between girl and werewolf rather than werewolf and granny. Rosaleen arrives and deduces that he has eaten her grandmother. They discuss the problems of not being able to belong completely in one world or the other. She holds him off with his own gun and when she shoots him, the pain causes him to transform again (painfully.) The doll's head substitution could also be explained by the potential difficulty for the

audience to imagine Rosaleen wanting to be the wolf's companion if we had just watched him devour Angela Lansbury in dripping detail.

The radio play ends with Red Riding Hood being lulled to sleep by a story from the werewolf. This is reversed in the screenplay and film: Rosaleen transforms the hunter permanently into an unconflicted, good wolf by burning his clothes, she tells him a story "about love between two wolves" to calm him thus taking on the role of storyteller herself, and they fall asleep together. But that is not the end. The screenplay continues to the next morning when Rosaleen's parents burst into the cottage, father with gun in hand. The male wolf escapes by leaping through a closed window, leaving a female wolf on the bed. Rosaleen's mother notices this wolf is wearing Rosaleen's crucifix and so prevents her husband from shooting the beast who also jumps through the window.

For the final image, the screenplay takes us back to the older sister's bedroom where we see her jump off her bed and dive into the floor that has transformed into water. After she passes, the water changes back into wooden floor, and the two wolves come into the room. This could have been a stunning use of special effects, and a lovely metaphor for the fluidity of meaning in storytelling, or the transformative nature of experience.

Unfortunately, the ending for the film was changed dramatically. Rosaleen is asleep in her bed, providing the old "it was just a dream" framework, and then wakes up terrified as Belgian shepherds (rather obviously not wolves) crash

through the window. She screams and screams, and then the film ends with a creaky and creepy rhyming voiceover that echoes Perrault's moral: "As you're pretty, so be wise; wolves may lurk in every guise. Now, as then, t's simple truth: sweetest tongue has sharpest tooth." It's disappointing, really, and rumor has it that Angela Carter was not too happy to see what Jordan chose to do with the ending. There is a good chance she knew that, by Tolkien's standards, using a dream framework is deliberately cheating: "It is at any rate essential to a genuine fairy-story, as distinct from the employment of this form for lesser or debased purposes, that it should be presented as 'true' " (Tolkien 19). But that, as they say, is show business. Linda Hutcheon describes veteran screenwriter William Goldman's wry interpretation of "the finished film as the studio's adaptation of the editor's adaptation of the director's adaptation of the actor's adaptation of the screenwriter's adaptation of a novel that might itself be an adaptation," which certainly applies in this instance (Hutcheon 83).



## Conclusion

So why adapt a fairy tale? Stephen Sondheim, James Lapine, Fiasco Theater Company, Angela Carter and Neil Jordan are all artists at the top of their game who have found value in going back to fairy tales for inspiration, each bringing their own particular sensibilities and artforms into a conversation that began long ago. Adaptation is not imitation, and faithfulness to the “original” text is not even an issue with a fairy tale that had multiple versions before it was ever written down in the first place. Adaptation is “repetition but without replication, bringing together the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty” (Hutcheon 173).

We all realize how difficult it is to pull a story out of thin air. A starting point is required. An artist (or a scholar) can’t help but imprint their work with their own personality, so while we all have stories to tell, self-expression does not require an original plot. Just ask William Shakespeare! If you want to talk about big themes like family, hunger, individual agency, sexuality, and/or death and dying, it helps to find a small story that not only is able to absorb and reflect what you individually bring to it, but also resonates with all its previous tellings. As Catherine Orenstein puts it, “The girl and the wolf inhabit a place, call it the forest or call it the human psyche, where the spectrum of human sagas converges and where their social and cultural meanings play out” (Orenstein 8).

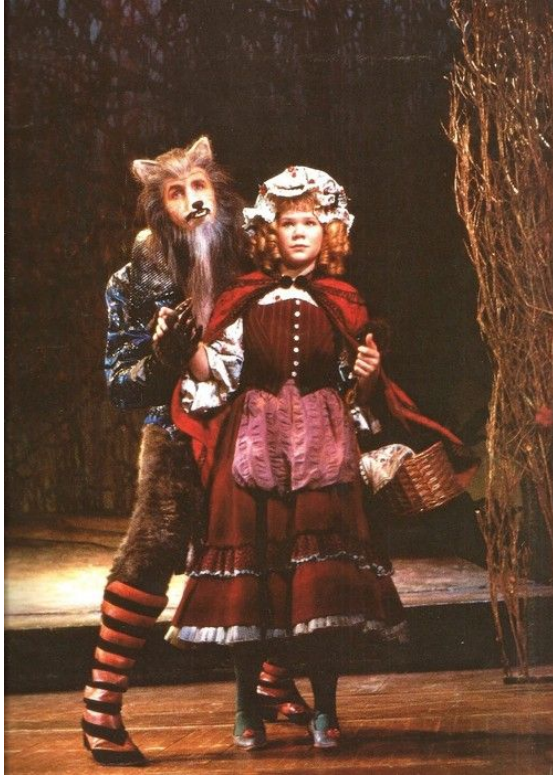
Each of the artists in this exploration has adapted the story of Little Red Riding Hood and incorporated it in their work, but in the bigger picture, they are all demonstrating the value of storytelling itself. We need to see and hear stories because we can learn from them. What we learn is not “Don’t talk to strangers!” or “Stay on the path!” We learn that others have gone down this path before, and we hope to hear that they came through. Therein lies the value of the happy ending that Tolkien finds essential in order for a fairy tale to be complete. The happy ending does not pretend that sorrow and failure do not exist in our lives, but it does hold the line against “universal final defeat” (Tolkien 60). In other words, a good fairy tale provides hope; it allows for the possibility of happiness, which can arrive in many forms. In *Into The Woods*, Little Red Riding Hood, the boy Jack, Cinderella, and the Baker all lose their families of origin in various tragic ways. As the musical draws to a close, the four of them find they can build their own unconventional family. In Carter’s short story *The Company of Wolves*, the girl loses her grandmother, but finds her happiness with the wolf. In the end, happy or not, storytelling gives each of us the promise that Sondheim encapsulates with the simple title of his beautiful song “No One Is Alone.”

THE END

## APPENDIX



Gustave Doré, for Perrault's *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, 1867 edition



Original Broadway cast, *Into The Woods*, 1987. Music & lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by James Lapine. Directed by James Lapine. Set by Tony Straiges, lighting by Richard Nelson, and costumes by Ann Hould-Ward. Robert Westenberg and Danielle Ferland pictured.



Fiasco Theater Company, *Into The Woods* at Old Globe Theater, San Diego CA. July 2014. Photo by Jim Cox. Pictured: Emily Young and Noah Brody. Directed by Noah Brody & Ben Steinfeld. Set by Derek McLane, costumes by Whitney Locher, lighting by Tim Cryan.





Playmakers Repertory Company, *Into The Woods*, Chapel Hill NC, December 2014. Pictured: Jessica Sorgi, Gregory DeCandia. Photo: Jon Gardiner. Directed by Joseph Haj. Set by Marion Williams, costumes by Bill Brewer, lighting by Josh Epstein.



Rosaleen (SARAH PATTERSON) encounters a strange hunter on her way to Granny's house in "THE COMPANY OF WOLVES." The Cannon Group, Inc., presents an ITC ENTERTAINMENT Presentation of A PALACE PRODUCTION. Written by Angela Carter and Neil Jordan. Produced by Chris Brown and Stephen Wooley. Directed by Neil Jordan. ©MCMXXXIV ITC Entertainment Ltd. All Rights Reserved.





ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

OCT 31, 2014 • #1335

**EXCLUSIVE**  
**Johnny Depp**  
AS THE WOLF  
**LILLA CRAWFORD**  
AS LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

**Into the Woods**  
THE MOST  
MAGICAL  
MUSICAL OF  
THE YEAR

# Holiday Movie Preview

FEATURING

## Into the Woods

P. 20

**PLUS**  
Angelina  
Jolie's Most  
Daring Role:  
Director  
*The Hobbit's*  
Insane Last  
Battle  
Disney's  
Cutest  
Robot Ever

EW.com  
\$4.99 (CAN. \$5.99)  
4 4

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beckett, Sandra L. 2008. *Red Riding Hood for All Ages: A Fairy-Tale Icon in Cross-Cultural Contexts*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books. 1969.
- Carter, Angela. 1979. *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981.
- Carter, Angela, and Mark Bell. 1996. *The Curious Room: Plays, Film Scripts and an Opera*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Carter, Angela, ed. *The Old Wives' Fairy Tale Book*. 1990. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Darnton, Robert. 1985. *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books.
- Greenhill, Pauline, and Sidney Eve Matrix, ed. 2010. *Fairy Tale Films: Visions of Ambiguity*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Hillard, Molly Clark. 2014. *Spellbound: The Fairy Tale and the Victorians*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Hopkinson, Nalo. 2001. *Skin Folk*. New York: Warner Books.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 2006. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge.
- "Johnny Depp's Big Bad Wolf From Disney's Into The Woods Is Just Bad." 2014. *io9*. Accessed November 23. <http://io9.com/johnny-depps-big-bad-wolf-from-disneys-into-the-woods-i-1649330684/+katedries>.
- Jordan, Neil. 1985. *The Company of Wolves*. Horror, Fantasy.
- Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook*. 1989. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Lüthi, Max. 1970. *Once upon a Time; on the Nature of Fairy Tales*. New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co.
- — —. 1982. *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Ondaatje, Michael, and Walter Murch. 2002. *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film*. 1st American ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf: Distributed by Random House.
- Orenstein, Catherine. 2002. *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale*. New York: Basic Books.
- Otten, Charlotte F. *A Lycanthropy Reader: Werewolves in Western Culture*. 1986. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press
- Perrault, Charles. *Perrault's Fairy Tales*. New York: Dover Publications. 1969.
- Perrault, Charles, and Sarah Moon. 1983. *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*. Paris: Grasset/Monsieur Chat.
- Propp, V. 1958. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Bloomington: Research Center, Indiana University.



- Sexton, Anne. 2001. *Transformations*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. [c1971]
- Smith, Kiki, and Helaine Posner. 2001. *Kiki Smith: Telling Tales*. New York: International Center of Photography Distributed by D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers.
- Sondheim, Stephen. 1989. *Into the Woods*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.
- — —. 1990. *Into the Woods* [Videorecording].
- — —. 2011. *Look, I Made a Hat: Collected Lyrics (1981-2011) with Attendant Comments, Amplifications, Dogmas, Harangues, Digressions, Anecdotes and Miscellany*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Sondheim, Stephen, and Mark Eden Horowitz. 2002. *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Stam, Robert. *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Stephens, John, and Robyn I McCallum. *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature*. New York: Garland Pub.
- Tatar, Maria, ed. 1999. *The Classic Fairy Tales: Texts, Criticism*. New York: Norton.
- Tatar, Maria. 2003. *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Teverson, Andrew. 2013. *Fairy Tale*. New York: Routledge.
- The Writer's Notebook: Craft Essays from Tin House*. 2009. 1st U.S. ed. Portland, OR: Tin House Books.
- Thomas, Joyce Augusta. 1989. *Inside the Wolf's Belly: Aspects of the Fairy Tale*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Tiffin, Jessica. 2009. *Marvelous Geometry: Narrative and Metafiction in Modern Fairy Tale*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. 1971. *Tree and Leaf*. London, Unwin Books. [c1964]
- Warner, Marina. 1995. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Yolen, Jane. *Touch Magic: Fantasy, Faerie and Folklore in the Literature of Childhood*. New York: Philomel Books.
- Ziolkowski, Jan M. 2007. *Fairy Tales from before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Zipes, Jack. 1986. *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England*. New York: Methuen,
- — —. 2011. *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films*. New York: Routledge,
- — —. 1983. *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in Sociocultural Context*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers.